

will be provided with retraining assistance for a limited period of time.

The Veterans Opportunity to Work Act provides services for the courageous men and women who served in the Armed Forces. It is in a spirit of deep gratitude and appreciation that I fight to provide for our veterans with the tools they need to find employment after serving our country. It is the responsibility of all Members of Congress and the Administration to fulfill our moral obligation to those who have fought to protect our freedom and democracy.

In the State of Texas, we have nearly 1.7 million veterans, and 18th District is home to 32,000 of them. Of the 200,000 veterans of military service who live and work in Houston; more than 13,000 are veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Additionally, there are almost 34,000 soldiers from Texas currently deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. I am supporting this legislation to ensure that our men and women in uniform are taken care of when they return from combat.

According to the Department of Labor as of June 2011 there are over 1 million unemployed veterans; over 632,000 are between the ages of 35 and 54. As Iraq and Afghanistan veterans come home, and as Vietnam, Cold War, and Persian Gulf War veterans can't find or lost their jobs, this results in a real loss of talented leaders and workers. Currently, there are 236,000 Vietnam Era veterans; 258,000 Cold War Era veterans; 182,000 Persian Gulf War veterans, and 192,000 Iraq and Afghanistan Era Veterans who are unemployed. These men and women have faced the enemy and lived to tell the tale, the least we can do is give them an opportunity to retain and enhance their skills in order to attain civilian employment.

This legislation addresses a need to find ways to provide training and employment assistance for the men and women who have fought for our country. Post 9/11 veterans who are now leaving the military may go to school on the 9/11 GI Bill; however veterans of previous conflicts are not afforded the same opportunity. To address the needs of these veterans this bill will provide for a limited time an

educational benefit to unemployed veterans between the ages of 35 to 60 at community colleges and technical training schools.

After dedicating their lives to serving our country it is important to assist veterans at all stages of their transition back to civilian life. A major part of transitioning into civilian life is to ensure that skills that were attained while in service are translatable to civilian employment. Veterans face a variety of obstacles to employment namely the language used to describe particular skill sets in the military does not correspond with the terminology used by civilian employers. This disconnect has created problems for veterans who are seeking certain types of employment and or licenses. The veterans are not able to translate their skills into terms that would demonstrate to civilian employers that they already possess the certain key skills.

In order to address this obstacle to employment, The Veterans Opportunity to Work Act (VOW) makes the Transition Assistance Program mandatory. The Department of Labor must thereby create a system by which licensure and certifications are translatable to those available at the state level. This is done in an effort to address the barriers between the skills and training received in the military and requirements for civilian licenses and other credentials'.

In addition, under H.R. 2433 the Department of Labor must work with states to implement new performance measures to evaluate the priority of services provided to eligible veterans and mandates that Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists and Local Veterans Employment Representatives sole duty will be to assist eligible veterans in finding suitable employment.

Throughout my tenure in Congress, I have remained committed to meeting both the needs of veterans of previous wars, and to those who are now serving. Veterans have kept their promise to serve our nation; they have willingly risked their lives to protect the country we all love. We must now ensure that we keep our promises to our veterans.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 2433, the Veterans Opportunity to Work Act.

RECOGNIZING ESCONTRIAS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S BLUE RIBBON AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

HON. SILVESTRE REYES

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 18, 2011

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the achievements of Escontrias Elementary School. Escontrias was recently honored with the 2011 National Blue Ribbon award from the United States Department of Education for excellence in education.

The National Blue Ribbon School award honors both public and private elementary, middle and high schools where students achieve at high levels and also schools where the achievement gap is narrowing. Since 1982, approximately 6,500 American schools have received this coveted award.

I want to personally congratulate the teachers, administrators, and staff of Escontrias Elementary. This year only 304 schools nationwide received the award, and they will be honored at a ceremony in Washington, D.C. The Blue Ribbon validates the efforts of these schools to create a positive and effective learning environment.

Escontrias principal Marivel Macias noted that the award "has solidified the notion that all things are possible". This national award exemplifies the dedication, persistence, and commitment that the Escontrias faculty, staff and community has for their students, and by closing the achievement gap, they will acquire the tools necessary to compete at a global academic level and become future world leaders.

In times of economic uncertainty, we cannot lose sight of the paramount importance of our children's education, and I am honored to represent Escontrias Elementary School.